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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how social capital is generated in schools. Social capital is defined as the resources available to actors that result from their interaction in a social network. The school sites selected for the study were relatively close in proximity to help control for social capital that is produced within communitywide structures, independent of the schools. Three schools (one Catholic; one non-Catholic, religious school; and one public school) were selected for the study. Multiple sources of data were utilized, including school documents, interviews with key informants, faculty interviews, focus groups, parent surveys, aggregate student-achievement scores, and observer notes. Results indicate that many of the types of activities that brought parents together at the three schools were similar in nature. However, the social capital that formed as a result of the social networks associated with the large and small schools was different. The two smaller schools, by utilizing other additional activities that allowed them to take advantage of the community and social networks already established by their affiliated church, exhibited a denser social network than was found in the large school. In the large school, social capital was found in clusters of social networks with little overlap. (RJM)

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Large or Small? Public or Private? What Matters Most in the Formation of Social Capital

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Large or Small? Public or Private?
What Matters Most in the Formation of Social Capital

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Introduction

The research reflected in this paper is part of an effort to determine how social capital is generated in selected schools, and to determine if its formation differs according to the size of the school, or whether the school is publicly or privately sponsored. Although further research will be necessary to fully resolve the issues raised in this paper, preliminary data from the three schools selected for this study indicates that these schools in general utilized similar mechanisms for social capital formation, but the mechanisms differed in efficacy according to the strength of the sponsoring community in which each school was embedded.

Social capital is used in this paper to describe the resources available to actors which results from their interaction in a social network (Coleman, 1988). These resources exist only in the context of a social network and although individuals may benefit from the social capital of the community, individuals can never rightfully claim to own social capital. Thus, the characteristics of the community are important to the formation of social capital and it is not expected that all communities have the same capacity to form and/or sustain the same amount of social capital. The work of Fukuyama is cited below to illustrate the effect differences between communities make to social capital formation, and the work of Putnam is cited to illustrate how changes within the same community may over time affect the maintenance of social capital.

The formation of social capital is attributed by Fukuyama (1995) as a major factor in the economic success of nations such as the United States, Japan, and Germany. This social capital is not the result of individuals acting on their own, but rather people working together in a community according to a common set of ethical norms. By working together under the same set of social norms, there is a prevalence of trust, and this trust, in turn, reduces the transaction costs by reducing the need for formal rules and regulations that have to be negotiated, agreed to, enforced, and litigated. However, Fukuyama warns that as current American society changes toward a more individualistic society, it will soon deplete its accumulation of social capital and this will bring economic as well as social consequences.

Robert Putnam, in the inaugural Pool Lecture (1995), documents from a number of independent sources this shrinking of America's stock of social capital. From the attendance records of PTA organizations, civic clubs, and even bowling leagues, he found evidence that Americans are significantly less engaged with their communities now than a generation ago. Although membership in "mailing list" and special interest groups such as the American Association of Retired People or the Sierra Club has grown, these organizations represent only individual ties to common ideologies and not individuals bonded to each other, as most members rarely interact face-to-face with each other. Putnam predicts that unless the quantity and quality of civic engagement increases dramatically in the future, Americans will "join, trust, and vote even less than they do today" (Putnam, 1995).

If, as Fukuyama and Putnam suggest, major changes are taking place in America, creating a more individualistic and less communally minded society, it should not be

surprising to find that these changes may have an effect on American institutions such as the school. Coleman (1989) reported that changes in American society in the previous two decades had not only weakened the family and the community but had also weakened the schools. He cited as evidence the declining numbers of high school students taking challenging science and math courses, as well as declining student achievement test scores.

As the public has perceived declines in measures of educational output, there have been several calls for reform. But many of the reforms that have resulted have focused on the school and may have improperly cast the school as the culprit, only to ignore the larger contribution of societal change. Successive waves of school reform have examined school curriculum, effective school practices, and school governance, but have often ignored the changes that have occurred in the families who send their children to the schools, or the changes in the communities in which the schools are embedded. Thus, many of these reforms have experienced only partial success as the problems are often deeper and broader than the focus of the reform.

In the past, fundamental changes in American society have brought about fundamental changes in education. When America was largely agrarian, there was little need for schools, as parents could teach their children all that they needed to know. As more people moved to the cities, life became more complex and schools were often organized by parents. Inequities developed though, as not all parents, especially immigrants, could afford an education for their children. This led to a call by reformers for a compulsory public education supported by all. Later, demands of an entrenched industrial society called for the consolidation of rural schools and the adaptation of factory-like bureaucratic structures for schools so that they could be more efficient.

The importance of considering these broader aspects of the community in a study of schools was illustrated in the Coleman and Hoffer study published as Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities (1987). In their study, they found that Catholic high school students had higher verbal and math scores than public school students. They called this finding the "Catholic sector effect". In searching for an explanation, they found that Catholic schools have social resources that exist in the form of social capital that is not as readily available in most public schools. And they found that these social resources were more effective in increasing student achievement in Catholic schools than the higher economic resources found in most public schools. Specifically, Coleman and Hoffer theorized that Catholic and other religiously-based schools have increased social capital due to the fact that these schools are embedded in a functional community. Thus, the religiously-sponsored schools today are often more like the common schools of a century ago in that they exist in functional communities that are able to enforce community norms.

Furthermore, the efficacy of the functional community may be enhanced by the smaller size of the school. Catholic schools are traditionally smaller than public schools in the same geographic area, and several recent studies have shown that students learn more in smaller schools (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Lee & Smith, 1995; Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996).

However, the Coleman and Hoffer explanation for the differences between Catholic and other schools has been criticized by some (Wehlage, et. al., 1989) as being inadequate as it views the school as a "black box". It treats the community, parents, and students as input and student achievement data as output, but fails to determine if there

are any unique characteristics or practices in Catholic and other religious schools that could contribute to these differences. Some findings (Bryk, Lee, Holland, 1993) indicate that Catholic schools tend to be smaller, less bureaucratic, and driven by ideology and doctrine, but these internal characteristics were not examined by Coleman and Hoffer.

The purpose of the research presented in this paper was to pry open that "black box"; to determine if the mechanisms of social capital formation were different in schools that vary in size and ideology. What was found was that the types of programs, policies, and practices that were capable of forming social capital were quite similar in the schools studied. However, the efficacy of the social capital differed according to the size of the school and characteristics of the community in which the school was embedded.

Perspective

The theoretical framework for this paper comes from the concept of social capital as defined by James S. Coleman (1988). Coleman describes social capital as the resources available to actors that result from their interaction within a social network. Social capital can exist in social networks as small as a family or as large as a community, and it may exist in the form of trust, information sharing, and norms with effective sanctions.

Coleman found it useful to conceive of individuals utilizing not only financial capital which is tangible, but also less tangible forms such as human capital and social capital (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, 1991). Financial capital refers to the wealth one has acquired and the means to increase this wealth. Human capital as first described by Shultz (1961) is the knowledge and skills acquired by an individual. These forms of capital differ, in that financial capital and human capital can be considered the possession

of particular individuals. However, social capital is not the possession of a particular individual, but instead exists in the relations between people and is diminished when individuals withdraw from social networks.

All three types of capital are important to the educational process. Financial capital can be used by families to provide learning resources, a suitable place to study, and quality schools. The human capital of adults within the family can be transferred to the children if there is sufficient social capital, that is, if the parents are physically present in the family and are able to give attention to the children. Social capital is weaker in families where only one adult is present or where the relations between the parent and child are not strong (Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996, 1997).

Although social capital exists in varying degrees within families, it can also be generated in some communities. This is especially true of what Coleman and Hoffer (1987) describe as a functional community. It is "...a community in which social norms and sanctions, including those that cross generations, arise out of the social structure itself, and both reinforce and perpetuate that structure" (p. 7). It is a community in which there is "closure" between the adult communities and the communities of youth. The norms are established by the adult community and enforced by intergenerational contact. This is the type of community typified by most neighborhoods in the past, but now are primarily found only in rural areas or in ethnic neighborhoods of urban areas.

Although Coleman and Hoffer (1987) report that value consistency grows through the social interaction found in a functional community, it is not necessarily true that all members of a functional community share the same values. However, it is true that in a functional community, there is a set of clearly defined values and norms that are dominant.

Those that differ from these values may hold these differences privately, as differential conformity bring differential status within the community.

Communities that have a large degree of value consistency may or may not constitute a functional community depending upon the quality and quantity of social interaction within the community. In regard to schools, "magnet schools" and some private schools (especially boarding schools) constitute value communities, in that attraction to the school is based primarily upon parent values concerning education. These parents often do not have many contacts with each other so they constitute more of a value community rather than a functional community.

Public schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could often be characterized as embedded in a functional community. The family, community, and society held to and reinforced dominant religions and cultural orientations. The common public school established upon residence, at that time, was a functional community based upon homogeneity of religious and cultural values. However, in time, technological and structural changes have greatly weakened these communities. The separation of residence and work has removed adults from local community interaction. Community interaction has been replaced by individuals joining special interest groups. Increases in affluence have reduced the interdependency of families (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

Although the residential public school retains little of the character of a functional community, according to Coleman and Hoffer (1987), religiously-sponsored schools often are situated in functional communities. By sharing the same religious values and the same place of worship, parents and students are able to interact more often than those in most public schools.

There is some theoretical indication, then, that the efficacy of schools may be related to the strength of the community in which the school is embedded. Schools that exist in a dense social network where everyone "knows each other" should be able to produce a large amount of social capital that could serve as a resource for all. However, schools that exist in a weak community where there are few social ties and little interaction would be expected to create little social capital.

An important organizational structure related to the strength of the community may be its size. It is easier in a small community for everyone to "know each other", and therefore to trust each other, share information, and to enforce the norms of the community. However, a large community is often administered bureaucratically to ensure equity, and relationships between members often become formal and distant.

Also important to the strength of a community may be the nature of the sponsoring agency. The bonds that unite members and the frequency of interaction between community members may be related to the qualities of the sponsoring agency. Parents who meet weekly at church may have a stronger relationship than those who meet infrequently in the geographical community.

Although it is recognized that other variables such as socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and others may also influence the strength of the community, the focus of this paper is that of school size and of school sponsoring agency, as previous research has identified these as relevant factors.

The value of this research is that it adds to the growing body of empirical research that has emanated from the theoretical consideration of social capital.

Methodology

The research that forms the empirical basis for this paper is part of a larger qualitative exploratory study that seeks to gain an understanding of the organizational processes and structures that contribute to the formation and maintenance of social capital within the school community. A qualitative method was selected as it was thought to be more useful than quantitative methods in revealing the factors that contribute to a phenomena about which little is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

A multiple case study approach was chosen as it provided several contexts in which to observe the phenomena that, according to Yin (1988), would increase the strength of the study over a single case study. This approach also facilitated using different types of schools so that the structures and processes common to several types of schools could be distinguished from those unique to a particular school.

The school sites selected for this study were relatively close in proximity in order to help control for social capital produced within community-wide structures, independent of the schools. They also were selected in order to provide contrasting types. A Catholic school and a non-Catholic religious school were chosen, as theory predicted they both should possess structure and processes that should produce social capital. A large public school was chosen for contrast, making it a theoretical replication (Yin, 1988). Furthermore, the use of private versus public, religious versus non-religious, Catholic versus non-Catholic, and large versus small distinctions assisted in teasing out those structures and processes common to social capital production from those that are particular to a specific type of school, size, or ideology.

Data

Multiple sources of data were utilized including school documents, interviews with key informants (principal, principal's secretary, active parents), faculty interviews or focus groups, parent surveys and focus groups, aggregate student achievement scores, and observer notes. Documents included parent-student handbooks, registration materials, school newsletters, parent organization minutes, school and sports calendars, and aggregate achievement data. The parent survey was administered to all parents in schools of less than 300 families and to a random sample of 300 in schools greater than 300 families. Observer notes were made by the researcher at several activities that involved parents, including sports events, booster club meetings, and back-to-school nights.

For analysis, this data was sorted into categories representing the major forms of social capital: trust, information sharing, norms and sanctions. Within each category, the characteristics of the relevant social network were recorded for each structure and process contributing to that form of social capital.

One of the difficulties in dealing with social capital is that due to its intangible nature, it is difficult to measure. Unlike economic capital, no records are kept of who "owns" what, and unlike human capital, there are no credentials that give evidence of education achieved or experience gained. Therefore, proxies were chosen to approximate the variables discussed.

Since social capital formation in schools is dependent upon parent face-to-face interaction with other parents and with school personnel, lists of "Opportunities for Parent Interaction" were compiled for each school. These "Opportunities for Parent Interaction" were taken to be the mechanisms for social capital formation. Although each

"opportunity" allowed for interaction, they varied greatly by design in their ability to build social capital. Some were information meetings or performances that allowed for interaction only before and after the event, but others, such as volunteer work, allowed for parents to interact closely for long periods of time.

In a similar manner, the percent of parents who volunteered their time at school was taken as a proxy for the relative amount of social capital. This is an appropriate proxy as it potentially includes all three forms of social capital: obligations, expectations, trust; shared information; effective norms. The parents who are volunteering are acting out of obligation or expectation. Furthermore, in performing the tasks, they often have opportunity to share information with each other or school personnel and will also need to operate within accepted school norms and enforce those norms as required by the task.

Findings

Each school is described separately utilizing the same general framework in order to facilitate later cross-case analysis. This framework includes a brief description of each school, its mission statement, the students, the parents, the faculty, a list of opportunities for parent interaction, and description of the social network and community in which the school is embedded. The specific components of this framework together provide for each case a context for understanding the mechanisms that produce social capital and the nature of the social networks in which it is found.

ST. MARK'S

St. Mark's is a Catholic school located in a quiet residential neighborhood a few blocks from the nearest freeway. Most of the pale yellow buildings sit on one corner of its 27-acre campus. Its facilities seem adequate, but most buildings appear to have been built in the 50's or 60's and could use some paint and other maintenance. Although it currently is coed, it was built originally in the early 1950's as an all-boys school, but later merged with an all-girls school. It is accredited for a full term through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, and the Western Catholic Education Association.

Mission Statement

As described in its admissions brochure, St. Mark's is a coeducational Catholic school available to all students within the diocese. The ministerial model of Jesus Christ is the philosophical basis for outreach and interaction at St. Mark's. Developing and exercising respect and concern for others is the main thrust of this Christian community. St. Mark's aims to educate through an experience that incorporates all aspects of a student's development. (It should be noted that this mission statement was undergoing revisions during the time of this study.)

Students

According to the principal, St. Mark's is a growing school of 324 students. Most of the students (84% to 86%) were reported to be Catholic, were primarily from active Catholic homes and came to St Mark's from other Catholic feeder schools. A comparison of a Chamber of Commerce demographic report with the results of a self-reported survey indicated that the school differed somewhat from its community in that some groups were underreported and others were overreported. The school survey

revealed 55% Caucasian, 34% Mexican-American or Hispanic, 4% African-American, 4% Asian and 3% other. The demographic report indicated a community that was 59% Caucasian including those of Hispanic origin, 14% African-American, 6% Asian, and 21% other. Most students (77%) lived 5 or more miles from the school.

According to the Parent-Student Handbook, students at St. Mark's were expected to behave in a Christian manner reflecting their Catholic faith and Christian morals. They also were expected to study, as there were eight AP classes and over 90% of the graduates were reported to go on to college each year.

Parents

As determined from the parent survey, most of the parents who sent their children to St. Mark's were married (77%), owned their own home (90%), had at least some college (92%), and earned more than $45,000 a year (70%). Furthermore, 85% spent some time volunteering at school, and 74% knew more than five other families in the school.

Faculty

There were twenty-two on the faculty roster, and they were equally divided male and female. The faculty all seemed well qualified, as they all had bachelors degrees, several had masters degrees, and a few had begun doctoral programs. Most participated in a special faculty mass held as part of faculty orientation, so it was assumed that most were Catholic. Most indicated in interviews that they lived within 10 miles of campus, although one traveled over an hour each day to reach St. Mark's.

Opportunities for Parent Interaction

1. School board member
2. Booster club (sports)
3. Book sale
4. Class reunion (many parents had attended St. Mark's)
5. Sports
6. Opening family liturgy and picnic
7. New parent orientation
8. Liturgy on campus
9. Freshman retreat
10. Grandparents day
11. Feeder school leadership day
12. Back-to-school night
13. Sports banquets
14. Monte Carlo night party (for parents)
15. Financial aid night
16. Campus clean up days (6)
17. State of the school assembly
18. School play
19. Parent-teacher conference
20. Parents picking up their children
21. Fund raising dinner
22. Academic decathlon
23. Science fair
24. Chaperone field trips
25. Volunteer workers
26. Golf tournament
27. School committees
28. Fund raising events
29. Kairos retreat

Social Networks

The strongest and most effective social networks came from the sports program. Sports activities attracted the largest groups of parents to the school on several occasions. Whether it was a football or basketball game, or a sports award banquet, large numbers of parents were seen on campus. The sports booster club was observed to be the largest, most active, and most effective parent group on campus. The school board and board

committees were also drawn from the parents, and they held an important but advisory role to the principal.

St. Mark's had developed a strong relationship with several "feeder" parish schools. Parents and students who came from each of these schools already knew each other and were part of an established social network due to their involvement with their parish church and school. The challenge, then, for St. Mark's was to integrate these units together into one, and the school provided several opportunities for parents to meet other parents and become part of the new, larger school-wide social networks. The first big push in this direction was the freshman retreat. As part of that activity, over 50 parents of freshmen were asked to lead a "parents' discussion" with a group of freshmen they did not know. This activity gave students an opportunity to get to know the students who came from the other parish schools as well as a few parents they had not known before.

There were several activities of a spiritual nature designed to unite the school families together spiritually. For the most part, these activities were observed to be poorly attended.

GREEN VALLEY

Green Valley is a brand new public school, in only its second year of existence. It is located at the intersection of industrial, agricultural, and residential areas. There are 228,000 square feet of permanent buildings, and 33,000 square feet of portable building space located on a 58-acre site. The forty-plus million dollar campus boasts a state-of-the-art library/media center, 100 teaching stations, each featuring a "learning wall",

televisions are in every classroom, linked by fiber optics, and each classroom has at least one computer linked to the Internet.

Mission Statement

As taken from their web site, "The mission of Green Valley High School is to create a nurturing and academically challenging environment, to educate our culturally diverse student population, and to prepare them to make positive life choices in a global society."

Students

Although Green Valley was only in its second year of operation, its current enrollment of 2,800 students exceeded its designed maximum of 2,600, and so portable classrooms were utilized. The students came from several communities, with some coming from up to 10 miles away. No ethnic make up of the school was found in any school document, but it was assumed that it would be close to that of the dominant geographical community. According to the Green Valley Chamber of Commerce, the city was 80% Caucasian, 19% Hispanic, 3% African-American, 4% Asian, and 11% other. Almost half of the students (47%) lived less than 5 miles from the school.

Parents

According to the parent survey, most of the Green Valley High School parents were married (83%), owned their own home (81%), had at least some college (84%), and most earned more than $45,000 a year (68%). Furthermore, 59% did not spend any time volunteering on campus, 25% spent one to ten hours a year volunteering, and 16% spent more than ten hours a year volunteering on campus. As the city of Green Valley was

noted for the strength of its community, it was not surprising to find that 54% of the parents knew six or more families in the school.

Faculty

There were 120 certificated staff members at Green Valley High School. It was learned in the faculty interviews that the Green Valley Unified School District is considered quite prestigious, as it is very selective and pays higher than average salaries. Furthermore, most of the faculty were not new to the district, as they transferred to Green Valley from other high schools in the district. This transfer included many who were very experienced teachers and even several who were department heads. It was also determined from interview data that the vast majority of the faculty lived in the city of Green Valley. Some of the faculty had not only grown up in the community, but had attended Green Valley schools up to and including college.

Opportunities for parent interaction

1. Parent conferences
2. Back-to-school night
3. Parent teacher student association
4. Site council meeting
5. Sports events
6. Booster club meeting
7. Sports award banquets
8. Parent university (District event held at GVHS)
9. Booster fundraising dinner
10. Fall crafts show
11. GVHS parents night presented by the sheriff's department
12. Speech competition
13. Sports breakfast
14. IEPs (Individual Education Plans)
15. Teacher appreciation day

Social networks

Green Valley High School owes its very existence to its community of parents. Although the community's only other high school was severely impacted for many years, several district attempts at bond issues to build a new campus failed. It wasn't until a parents' committee was organized, paid for advertising, walked the neighborhoods and worked phone banks that the drive for another bond issue passed, enabling GVHS to be built. Some of the leadership of that parents' committee remains active in the GVHS parent organization, but most of the social network that had formed to pass the bond issue was lost before the school opened.

Although most students who attended Green Valley High School came from the City of Green Valley, the school's boundaries included several growing, unincorporated communities up to ten miles away. The mayor of Green Valley noted in an interview that he suspects that in the future, as the unincorporated areas grow and send even more students to Green Valley High School, it will eventually lose its strong ties with the city of Green Valley.

The parents' organization had a strong board and boasted 600 paid memberships. However, its monthly meetings were observed to be attended mostly by its own board members and a few other parents.

The sports program created the largest and most sustained opportunity for parent interaction. As a large high school, there were over 50 sports teams playing during each season. Parents attended not only the games, but also the booster clubs, fund raising dinners, and sports award functions.

In addition, there were a few performing arts booster clubs that gave parents an opportunity to support their students' participation in the performing arts programs as well.

LAS COLINAS ACADEMY

Nestled against the foothills of a major mountain range, Las Colinas Seventh-Day Adventist Academy is situated on approximately 25 acres. Most of its buildings were built in the late 1970's and were all well maintained. Las Colinas is a K-12 school with separate buildings to house grades K-8 and the high school grades 9-12. There is also a large gym and a large technology building that could accommodate architecture, automotive technology, photography, and wood working. Las Colinas is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges as well as the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists.

Mission

According to its Parent-Student Handbook, Seventh-Day Adventists believe that a knowledge of God, communion with him, and emulation of his character are of paramount importance; only in cooperation with God can the individual, in the quest for knowledge, reach the optimum development of mental, physical, and spiritual powers.

Las Colinas endeavors to provide a Christian-related education that will transmit American culture, academic excellence, and also the heritage that is singularly Seventh-Day Adventist.

Students

Most of the 328 K-12 (134 high school) students at Las Colinas came from the nearest Seventh-Day Adventist churches. However, several of the students had commutes of up to an hour to reach the school. According to the principal, several other students attended Las Colinas even though they lived close to another Seventh-Day Adventist school, because Las Colinas was smaller. No school data was available regarding the ethnic makeup of the student body. However, it was observed that most students were Caucasian, although ethnic diversity was seen throughout the campus.

Parents

According to the parent survey, most of the Las Colinas parents were married (95%), owned their own home (86%), had at least some college (96%) (including 35% who attended graduate school), and most earned more than $45,000 a year (85%).

Furthermore, 82% of the parents spent some time volunteering on campus and 77% of the families knew more than five other families at the school. In fact, 36% of the families reported knowing more than twenty other school families.

Since Las Colinas was a Seventh-Day Adventist school, most parents as determined in interviews, were Seventh-Day Adventists, and attended one of the three major Seventh-Day Adventist churches in the communities surrounding the school.

Faculty

The elementary faculty consisted of seven teachers with one for each grade K-6. All but one of the elementary staff were female. Most had taught six or more years, but at different schools.

The two junior high teachers offered contrast with each other in that the female had taught for over six years (three of them at Las Colinas), and the male teacher had taught for over twenty years with about half of them at Las Colinas.

The high school staff consisted of nine teachers, four males and five females. About half the staff had been there two years or less, and the other half had been there for six or more years. There was some cross over among the junior and senior high school teachers as well. The music teacher and the computer teacher served both the elementary and secondary divisions.

The interviews determined that most of the staff lived in the general area of the school, and all attended nearby Seventh-Day Adventist churches. Some were more active than others in their churches, as some wished to keep a lower profile, especially with the youth they served on a daily basis.

Opportunities for parent interaction

1. Sports events
2. Parent teacher association meetings
3. Grandparents day
4. Fund raising activities
5. Choir festival
6. Drama programs
7. Home and school nights
8. Parent teacher conferences
9. Teacher appreciation day
10. Spring concert
11. Christmas program
12. Awards reception
13. Graduation and baccalaureate
14. Senior parents meeting (November)
15. School fair
16. Missions trip
17. College financial aid workshop
18. Back-to-school night
19. Education day (at various churches)

20. Parent volunteers
21. Driving to field trips
22. International mission outreach
23. Room mothers (elementary)
24. Santa's workshop (elementary)
25. Selling Scrip
26. Parties (elementary)
27. Parents picking up their children

Social networks

The biggest social network for the parents of the school was that formed by the church. People knew each other from their regular attendance at church and church activities. The faculty, administration, and most of the parents worshipped together as members of the three supporting churches. The influence of the largest and closest church was felt the most. Even parents who attended the other supporting churches (not the largest), seemed to know each other, having gone to the Seventh-Day Adventist University together, or they may have worked together at a Seventh-Day Adventist institution. The church and school were closely tied together, and interview participants explained that it was sometimes difficult to determine if an activity was a church activity or a school activity, since the young people were the same for each activity and because each institution freely used the other's campus, personnel, and/or vehicles.

School parents knew many of the other parents. This created an unusual situation in that the school parent organization appeared weak as few parents were reported to attend meetings. However, when something needed to get done, a few telephone calls were made and the parent volunteers were there.

Discussion

Similar types of activities

Many of the types of activities that brought parents together at St. Mark's, Green Valley and Las Colinas were very similar. For example, each had a back-to-school night where the parents were able to see the administration and faculty; each enabled parents to talk with their students' teachers in some form of scheduled or drop-in parent conference; and each brought parents on campus to see their students perform, both on the athletic field or on stage. These similar activities all brought parents to the school where they could interact with each other and school personnel.

One explanation for these similarities may be found in the concept of institutional isomorphism as described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). They found that many organizations which are otherwise free to be different often conform to the prevailing organizational structures so as to gain institutional legitimacy. Thus, all three schools in this study may have adopted many similar activities and policies as their educational policymakers felt it was expected that schools provide these activities. Specifically, these schools may have all adopted back-to-school nights, sports activities, fine art performances, and parent conferences because they may have felt that without these activities, they may be considered less than legitimate as schools in the eyes of their communities.

Though many of the types of activities among the schools were similar, there were several differences that influenced social capital formation. At St. Mark's, there was an emphasis on service and there were several opportunities for parents to clean the school and participate in fund raising activities. There were also several social activities just for

the parents at St. Mark's, although they often also served as school fund raisers. Las Colinas often brought the school to the church through its "education day" and various school programs held in the churches. Since they were both religious schools, St. Mark's and Las Colinas held religious services on campus, which parents were invited to attend.

Large vs. small

The social capital that formed as a result of the social networks associated with the large and small schools was different. In both small schools, there was a denser social network than was found in the large school. In the large school, social capital was found in clusters of social networks that overlapped very little. For example, in the area of sports, there was much competition for positions on the athletic teams and performing roles in the large school. As a consequence, only "the best" were selected and it was often true that individuals were only "the best" in one or a few areas. Therefore, parents whose students played varsity basketball did not necessarily know the parents whose students played in the band. However, in the smaller high schools, everyone was needed to field the teams and participate in the other school activities, even when ability may have been marginal. With more opportunities and fewer students to fill those opportunities, more students became involved in more activities (Holland & Andre, 1987). This, in turn, gave the same parents more opportunity to get to know each other as they supported their children by attendance at performances and service in booster activities. Thus, the social networks in the smaller high schools were denser and there was considerably more overlap.

The larger size of everything at the large school mitigated against a feeling of intimacy or connectedness. This was especially true at the sports events where parents

were physically more distant from the playing fields or courts, and they attended in a much larger group. Thus, there seemed to be less frequent yelling of encouragement to individual players at the large school, as it would not be heard at the field or court, and parents interacted only with their spouse or the friends next to them. In the smaller schools, parents were in closer proximity to the sports action and to each other. This facilitated interaction with each other and created a greater feeling of intimacy. Parents were observed to often yell encouragement to individual players as well as in support of the team effort. Thus, even the physical dimension of smallness in the smaller schools contributed to social capital formation.

However, it should be noted that as both small schools were private, it cannot be discerned from this study whether the observations made here were due to the schools being private or small. Further research utilizing similar methods as employed in this study but which would include a small public high school and a large private school would be helpful in further teasing out these differences. It is speculated by this researcher, however, that most small public high schools are found in small rural communities, and that because there is a greater interdependency and "everyone knows each other" in the rural community, these schools would have much in common with the small private schools. It is further speculated that large religious schools would have much in common with the large public schools.

Public vs. private

The two private, religiously-sponsored schools both seemed to exist in a denser social network that produced more social capital than the public school. The principal of St. Mark's was aware of the importance of building school community and specifically

designed activities to unite the students of the various parishes. On the other hand, Las Colinas was embedded in a dense social network that was due to the denomination and church which sponsored the school. In both cases, a large amount of social capital was available in the private schools. In contrast, although the city of Green Valley was noted for its strong sense of community as it was a city of over 60,000, it did not provide a dense social network for Green Valley High School. Most parents at GVHS did not know each other, nor did the teachers know many of the parents of their students.

Conclusions

Although further empirical research will be necessary to fully resolve the issues raised in this paper, some important findings are apparent. What this research has found is that in the schools studied, many of the programs, practices, and policies that were capable of forming social capital were the same whether the school was a large public school or a small private school. However, the small private schools utilized other additional activities that allowed them to take advantage of the community and social networks already established by their affiliated churches. These additional activities allowed them to unite related social networks and to build school-wide social capital that was available to all within the school community.

In general, it can be seen from this empirical research that schools are affected by the communities in which they are embedded. Whether the school be large or small, public or private may not matter so much as the characteristics of the social networks in the community that supports the school. What matters most in the formation of social capital in schools may not be the size of the school or the type of sponsoring agency, but rather the quality of the community in which the school is embedded.

There is a public perception that schools need "fixing" and consequently, there are many engaged in the task of school reform. The research presented in this paper links the social capital (the social resources available to everyone in the school community) with the quality of the community that sponsors the school. If, as Fukuyama (1995) and Putnam (1995) observe, our communities are in decline, then when and where that is true, our schools are at risk. Perhaps the lens of public scrutiny should be raised higher, to encompass not only the school, but the surrounding community. Communities, like schools, are social constructs and as such, they are susceptible to change if it is in the will of the society and the desire of social policy makers. It may be that as we change and strengthen our communities, we will change and strengthen our schools which, in turn, may raise the academic achievement of our students and strengthen our society.

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